Honey in the Lion

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Honey in the Lion

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Summary

Clarice stopped in front of Lecter's cell and he smiled up at her from his cot. He didn't greet her, instead launching into a new topic.

"Do you know the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx, Clarice? The beast promised to eat any who could not answer the riddle. But Oedipus was clever enough to answer the riddle but blind to his fate."

"Is this a thinly veiled way of calling me a dense motherfucker?" Clarice replied dryly. Hannibal actually chuckled.

"Never, Clarice. You're far too bright for that."

Notes

Hi there! So I've spent my first week back from college rewatching and rereading Silence of the Lambs because I love it so. And I have such love for Ardelia Mapp and her being comparable to Hannibal to Clarice's Will Graham, and I had to write it out. A few of these lines and themes in this fic are lifted straight from the text, because I felt like playing around with source material, pretending like I was writing season 4 myself. So, if you're a fellow book fan, I hope you enjoy my creative exercise and all the little Easter eggs. Enjoy! And don't forget to read the other stories in this series as well!

(Oh, and there's a quote from the American Gods show as well! Double points if you can find it and tell me in the comments!)

See the end of the work for more notes

Beautiful.

Blood streaming down his face, down Hannibal's face. It dripped from the knives, from their fingers, and Hannibal uses it to anoint the scars on Will's forehead and cheek before breathing against his lips as they lay back in bed after a kill, unbothered to wash the evidence off yet.

"Will."

It's not Hannibal's voice, it's too grating and slimy, like a piece of uncooked fat in a bite of meat that gets stuck in your teeth. Frederick.

Will opens his eyes, not even trying to see through his drugged haze. He laughs, and it sounds too high and light, but it it escapes him anyway. Jack's trying again, trying to fix something that isn't broken. Teacup came back together, he doesn't understand that. Neither does Frederick, who doesn't learn from anything ever.

"Can I get another shot?" he murmurs, snickering again as he strains his wrist against the restraint. "It was just getting good."

"Do you know where you are?"

"Cuba," he mutters. There's a sigh somewhere behind him.

"No. You're in Baltimore, Maryland, Will."

"I want to go back, come on, I need another dose."

"That would result in an overdose, Will."

"Which would be preferable to your brand of therapy, Frederick. Put me back under, it's the best therapy you've given me so far."

Jack's words are low, trying to give comfort where he can't provide it. "Will. What happened in Cuba?"

Warm sand on the beach, house with the windows open and curtains wispy in the breeze, blood spatters in the walls of the basement, twisted white sheets bunched in a fist, soft words against his ear.

"It was beautiful," he managed to say, eyes feeling heavy at the same time he felt angrier. "And now it's broken, shattered, not gathering itself together." He struggled against the restraints, wanting to lash out, scream, claw, bite, tear, stab.

"You are delusional, Will."

"Delusions have to feel real, that's why they are delusions," Will hisses, struggling hard enough to cut at his skin. "I know I'm dreaming when I'm awake, that's why I want to close

my eyes and pretend like it's just a regular dream. Your delusion is that the man that you used to know is still alive and willing to catch your criminals for you, that's why you have a new girl. Is she going to get broken, too? Are you going to nudge her off the edge off of the counter and watch her shatter into a million little pieces? Like *me?"*

He snaps his teeth once in vain before he feels himself slipping back into the darkness that lies behind his eyelids. When he opens them again, *he's lying on the couch in the living room, his feet on the upholstery like Hannibal hates but lets him do it anyway. He sits up fully and smiles as he watches Hannibal cut up a bell pepper.*

"Welcome back to the land of the living," Hannibal teases. Will blinks away the bitterness growing in his smile.

"Yeah," he replies, managing to keep the pain out of his voice, even if he thinks that if anything, they are ***both*** *dead now.*

Clarice stared at the spread on TattleCrime's front page: a photo manipulation, comparing her face to one half of Miriam Lass, the other half to Will Graham. The article is a long breakdown of the similarities and differences between the three of them, debating whether Clarice was able to hold up against the strain of being Jack Crawford's pet agent. Even worse, the comment section was absolutely brutal, and there was a betting pool on how long she would last, what would happen to her. Clarice tried to not let emotion get into her voice as she read some of them over to Ardelia, who was transcribing all of the notes Clarice had missed while on the case.

"This guy says that he's not sure if Lecter wants to kill me or fuck me or eat me alive," she said, her finger tracing over the screen of her laptop. "And this other guy says *all three,* but he doesn't want to know in what exact order."

"If that cannibal gets within six feet of you with no glass separation, I'll shoot him right between the eyes," Ardelia stated, not even looking up from her writing. "My aim is getting better."

It made Clarice laugh. Ardelia was good at that.

Ardelia was good for her in a lot of ways. In Clarice's mind, Hannibal Lecter and Ardelia Mapp were the smartest people she knew, but Ardelia was steadfast and reassuring in all the ways Lecter was sinister. She was studious, top of the class, always ready to help her study and keep her on track. She was neat as a pin, nothing out of place and everything exactly as it should be. Sometimes, Ardelia would let her take naps in her bed, where the sheets were smooth and always freshly changed, and everything was clean and as it should be. Ardelia was no-nonsense, but not straightlaced. Like when Clarice came back from meeting Pilcher about the mouth and said that she thought she was cute, Ardelia fired back with a straight face, "Kiss her."

“We’re dating, you know.”

“You’re stressed, girl, you need all of the kisses, from all the pretty boys and girls. Trust me, I’m going to be valedictorian.”

Ardelia could cook while Clarice struggled with scrambled eggs. She cooked out of her grandmother’s hand copied book of recipes that was dotted in gravy and juice and coffee and other foodstuffs, the only messy item in her possession. Because a clean cookbook means that either you can’t cook or the recipes are shit, she had once told her. Now you sit your ass down and let me feed you, you can’t be an FBI agent on an empty stomach.

Ardelia talked while she cooked, talked during dinner, about class, about life, about her favorite music, her favorite poems.

She had gotten a poster printed for Claire's birthday, a plain navy blue background with their favorite Dickinson quote in showy white script:

“If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain.”

Clarice kept it pinned above her mirror that was stuck to the back of her bedroom door, it was nice to look at, it reminded her of better times. Times when cannibals and corpses and moths weren’t fluttering around inside her mind.

She sighed out right, now, closing the laptop and leaning back into her chair, rubbing her temples as she closed her eyes. Everything had to be so loud, so much, all of the time. It was starting to get to her, she knew it. Something fell in her lap, and when she looked down, there was half a Mounds bar, still in the wrapping.

“Ardelia?”

“Your blood sugar is low, girl. Eat it.”

Clarice had to smile at that, enjoying the chocolatey coconut goodness. It was a perfect dessert after the jambalaya Ardelia had made for dinner. It helped a little as she watched Ardelia come back from the kitchen with a cup of tea in hand.

“Clarice, listen to me,” she said, firm, but not unkind. “Now this may not make me sound like a good FBI agent, but I am your friend, Clarice, I care about your mental health more than I care about a body getting cold in a morgue or some unknown maniac. I’m going to help you.”

“Really?” Clarice laughed, accepting the cup of tea. “And tea’s going to do that?”

“Hell yeah, this is my grandmother’s Smart People Tea. It’s got ginseng green and blueberry, get those antioxidants in the bloodstream, get your mind back on track, and dark chocolate nibs to soothe the soul. Plus a ground-up sleeping pill so that you can sleep in and enjoy a canceled fingerprinting lecture tomorrow.”

“Sleeping pills in the tea? Sneaky,” Clarice grinned, tilting the mug back and forth and watching the liquid slosh around. “You want to knock me out?”

“Knock out the knockout,” Ardelia joked as Clarice finished the tea, giving the mug back to her and heading back to bed. “Sweet dreams.”

For the first time since she has been put on the Buffalo Bill case, Clarice does, in fact, have the sweetest dreams of all: none.

God, was Chilton actually incapable of shutting the fuck up?

Clarice was desperately trying to stay awake, even the full night’s sleep from before didn’t make much difference when she was stuck in a too-warm office while the head of the BSHCI blabbed about everything and nothing. So she had taken a stack of papers on Lecter and Graham and sat at the table on the couch, pouring over them, and trying to make sense of this world she was living in.

“I’d advise you to not approach the glass, Miss Starling,” Chilton says in a near sneer, sleaze oozing in every syllable. “Hannibal gets testy at times. Not a month ago, he did this to one of the nurses.” He removes a picture from his file and shows it to her. “They managed to save her right eye.”

Clarice smiles with nothing behind her eyes. “Great.”

That appears to get Chilton a little miffed, it makes this just a bit more tolerable.

When she’s finally alone with Lecter, it's frightening how genuinely warm he can appear.

“You don’t seem to be sleeping well, Clarice,” he states, drawing something at the desk that he appears quite enthralled with. “Trouble?”

“We’re not here to discuss my sleeping habits, doctor.”

Hannibal’s smiles always felt genuine. It was unnerving. “Well, you cannot perform to the best of your ability if your mind is adrift in the sea of your imagination. I suppose that Jack would agree with me. You are a new addition, Clarice, is he already wearing you down?”

“I think Buffalo Bill has more to do with that than Agent Crawford,” Clarice responds coolly. Hannibal tasks once, twice.

“You cannot be sure of that, Clarice,” is his carefully worded response as his pen does loops across the page. Clarice chooses to change the subject.

“Dr. Lecter, the FBI has prepared a list of possible perks for you if you cooperate in the Buffalo Bill investigation. A larger cell, one with a window, in a better facility. More space for your drawings. Why do you have so many?”

“Drawings, Clarice, are my memories. Memories are all that I have left in this life to savor,” he states, gesturing towards a picture of a Havana hotel, near another picture of Will

Graham in a bright, small smile, extending his hand as if inviting the viewer to come with him. "I trust that you can understand the sentiment of a memory, whether bad or good."

"I can. Now, what do you want, doctor?"

Hannibal ponders this, then smiles again. She can see his teeth when he does that, and she feels a little like Little Red Riding Hood.

My, my. What big teeth you have.

"I already gave my request to Jack, did he not inform you?"

"I don't know where we could acquire 'the honey in the lion', that's a little vague."

"The FBI suffers from a lack of imaginative thinking," Hannibal said, obviously very pleased with himself, even as the since Will left section of the sentence goes unsaid.

Clarice replayed this memory in her head and rolled her eyes when Jack asked for her opinion on Hannibal's latest statement.

"I think everything around here is far too vague," she said, and almost smiled when Agents Zeller and Price visibly held back a snicker. Jack audibly sighed.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked. Clarisse rolled her eyes, unable to hold it back.

"Why don't *you* try listening for once, instead of me?"

"Did I just hear that?" Jack said, coolness in his tone, dangerously low. It would make her shiver in her core, except she can't get Hannibal Lecter's deceptively warm eyes and voice out of her head, and the only thing that can top that is the absolute *lack* of warmth in Will Graham's voice. Clarice just sighed, leaning her head back in her chair and closing her eyes.

"I'm *thinking,* sir, give me a minute."

And she was. Thoughts of Hannibal's almost kind smile that had ripped a face to shreds not a month before. Duality of man vs nature, the fight between baser instincts and an intense need to be the cleverest person in the room.

Her vision floods behind her eyes with images of a skinned girl in a body bag, which had been stuck in her mind for days since she saw her laid out like a fish on a grocery counter, ready to be plucked apart and dissected and consumed and the rest disposed of. It made her feel sick to her stomach, especially as she reached up through the plastic and whispered, *"Clarice…"*

"I don't think that she can take it," Frederick said over his coffee, looking up and Jack in a way that looked like he staring down at him. "Really, Jack, *look* at her."

Clarice was just staring, eyes open, staring off into nothing, grey eyes shimmering. Brian was tempted to go over and gently nudge her back into the land of the living, but Jimmy stopped him with a hand on his arm, whispering that it would be like waking a sleepwalker.

“She’s thinking,” Jack stated, eyes hard and secure in the knowledge that he would go stand by his statements to the end, even if they resulted in tragedy.

“Yes, ‘thinking,’ Hannibal’s mentioned that he finds that interesting. Something about hearing lambs screaming. Honestly, Jack, Will Graham only looks through the eyes of killers and see what happened to him. How long before she starts hearing voices telling her what to do?”

There’s a fragile whisper that sounds just on the verge of breaking as Clarice looks down at a specific picture in her hands and says in a low voice, a quote from Hamlet:

“Oh god, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.”

It sent a chill down everyone’s spine and then she blinked once and looked up, completely unaware of what she had said. “What? What are you all looking at?”

Jack opened his mouth to ask what the hell she was doing when she stood up, walking right over to Chilton’s desk, taking a file from in front of him, removing all the paper clips, and then extracting the document she wanted. She was smiling.

“Excuse me,” she said to the room, nodding before she left the room, not a spring in her step but her head full of light. Clarice stopped in front of Lecter’s cell and he smiled up at her from where he was laying on his cot. He didn’t greet her, instead launching into a new topic.

“Do you know the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx, Clarice? The beast promised to eat any who could not answer the riddle. But Oedipus was clever enough to answer the riddle but blind to his fate.”

“Is this a thinly veiled way of calling me a dense motherfucker?” Clarice replied dryly. Hannibal actually chuckled.

“Never, Clarice. You’re far too bright for that.” A pause. “Perhaps I was referring to Frederick.”

Clarice held back her laugh. She was not going to become friendly with Hannibal Lecter, everyone who did that came away with a scar. A line from a poem comes into her mind.

Step into my parlor, said the spider to the fly…

“I know your riddle, doctor,” she smiled. “Honey in the lion, sweetness within ferocity. Something that can make a predator vulnerable, penetrating the seemingly invincible outer layer by growing from within. Intimate with one's baser instincts.”

She pulls out a drawing of Will Graham leaning against a front door, as though he is waiting for someone to join him, smiling at the viewer and his eyes seem to beckon you forward, a

mix of darkness and sparks glowing in them. And then she places the drawing in the mailslot and fixes Hannibal Lecter with a no-nonsense look.

"Will Graham is the honey in the lion, isn't he?"

Hannibal stands up from his cot, stretching in a way reminiscent of a big cat. He comes closer to the glass and Clarice stepped back as a precaution. She knows not to get too close. He accepts the drawing and his fingers trace across the lines.

For one brief *second,* the mask slips a little and she can feel a twinge of pain in heart at the sheer *softness* of his expression. She blinked and it's gone, the paper neatly folded and his grin reminiscent of a shark is back.

"Benjamin Raspail. He was a terrible flutist, decent liver," Hannibal said, as though he were remembering an old friend, not a victim or a snack. "Storage locker #491, at the facility on the east end of town. You'll find some answers there."

Clarice was stunned for a moment that *for once,* he was being *clear.* It *had* to be a trap, and she said so: "How do I know you aren't just pulling me along?"

"Oh, Clarice," Hannibal said fondly, rubbing his index finger across the folded-over paper. "I promise that I would never lie to you. And I *always* keep my promises."

Will just looked over his book at Jack giving him a hard look through the bars of his cell. He shrugged, "I turned in the evidence file, Jack. Nothing's missing, I promise."

"Will. Do you have any idea who Buffalo Bill is? We need you to-"

"Oh, I *know* who he is, Jack," Will smiled, mischief glinting in his eyes. "But there's nothing on this earth that could get me to tell you."

"Will-"

"I *want* to talk to Hannibal again, see him again," Will said coldly. "But as he is *dead,* I suppose you're going to have to either find Bill by yourself, or let your *new* profiler drive herself over the edge. Your choice."

Jack closed his mouth, and frowned. Will turned his page and kept reading.

He let his eyes close again, *and opened them again to turn to his side, finding himself back in the bed in Cuba, smiling as he watches Hannibal lick his finger to turn the page in his own book.*

"How long can we survive on memories?" he asked quietly. Hannibal looked up from his book and smiled at him.

“I promise, Will. We will see each other again soon,” Hannibal reassured, reaching out his free hand to tuck a lock of hair behind Will’s ear. “Soon.”

End Notes

Clarice is my favorite character literally ever, along with Ardelia. (Oh, and if any of y'all noticed, yes, I did reference that Pilcher is a girl. I feel like Bryan would genderbend him, SOTL is a sausage fest as is.)

Hope you all enjoyed this fun little piece!

Please, please leave all the comments and kudos you like! I love responding to them! Come visit me on Tumblr!

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